

Week of October 7, 2002: MDOT Flash Facts

Topic: Put the Brakes on Fatalities

Monday

Facts:

42,000 people die every year in crashes in the United States. That's more people than the population of the city of Lewiston. Nearly everyone has been affected in some way by the devastating consequences of a vehicle crash. One person dies on Maine roads every two days (1 teenager dies every 10 days).

Tips:

Put the Brakes on Fatalities Day is being observed nationally this week. There are 3 components to highway safety:

1. Driver Behavior (often the leading contributing factor in crashes). Check your own driving behaviors:
 - Attitude (bad attitudes translate to unsafe actions behind the wheel)
 - Risk-taking and thrill seeking
 - Awake (being tired or fatigued will slow your response, or worse, allow you to fall asleep at the wheel.)
 - Alcohol or Drugs (affect judgment, reaction, and risk taking)
 - Attention (driving requires concentration-things happen very quickly and you need to respond in a fast and safe manner)
2. Vehicle Equipment, Design and Maintenance
 - Many new safety design improvements (such as seat belts, air bags and improved occupant protection), but vehicle occupants must use the safety equipment – so make sure everyone buckles up!
 - Drivers need to address the small problems and the routine maintenance items before they become big safety problems (routinely check tires, brakes, battery, wipers, washer fluid, radiator and other fluids)
3. Roadway Design, Signage and Road Improvements
 - Roadways need to be continually evaluated to identify safety improvements.

Wednesday

Facts:

In the US, a crash related fatality occurs every thirteen minutes; an injury every 10 seconds.

Driver behavior is a significant factor in crashes. Unsafe behaviors that lead to crashes include speeding, driving drowsy, driver inattention and distraction, failing to yield the right of way and not maintaining proper lane position.

Speed is the leading contributing factor in fatal crashes. In Maine, speed was a factor in 203 fatalities in the past three years.

Problems caused when you speed:

- Loss of vehicle control (cannot brake or maneuver in a safe manner)
- Reduced reaction time (may not have time to react to a crossing pedestrian, a car leaving a driveway or a moose that has entered the roadway)
- Increased severity of impact, resulting in more serious injuries and greater vehicle damage.

Friday

Facts:

In Maine, nearly 200 fatalities occurred in 2001. 2002 may turn out to be an even deadlier year. That's one person every two days (and 1 Teenager every 10 days)! Earlier this week we spoke about the dangers of speed. The other leading poor driver behaviors that lead to crashes are:

Facts and Tips:

1. Driver Inattention Distraction (a factor in 180 deaths over the last three years in Maine):

- When driving-just Drive! (Do not let other activities take your eyes or mind off the road or hands off the wheel. Maps, cell phones (even hands-free models), reaching for a CD or to change the radio station, eating or even just talking to passengers all take away from the mental and physical attention driving requires.)

2. Driving left of the center line (and not passing) resulted in 87 fatalities from 1999-2001. This may be due to going too fast into curves.

Stay alert:

- Evaluate road changes well ahead
- Look for signs warning of curves, speed and other changing road conditions.

Adjust early to needed driving changes. (Sudden braking or maneuvering at the last minute may cause you to leave your lane or lose control.)

Leaving your lane can lead to a head on crash-a very severe crash type, or run off the road with equally serious results.

3. Failure to yield the right of way resulted in 58 deaths in the last 3 years.

Make sure that the road you are entering is clear before moving into it. Some of the situations where you must yield are:

- At a yield sign
- To pedestrians
- To emergency vehicles
- To through traffic
- Avoid "tunnel vision" that can occur while driving, especially in wooded areas. Watch for driveways, entrances and intersections, and be prepared to stop quickly at all times.
- Before making a right-turn-on-red, after coming to a complete stop.

Flash, the MDOT spokesperson reminds you to Be a Road Model!

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